

BY THE WAY



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HIM, ANCIENT & MODERN – 3

As far as the eye could reach, I found myself gazing on a surging sea of aunts. There were tall aunts, short aunts, stout aunts, thin aunts, and an aunt who was carrying on a conversation in a low voice to which nobody seemed to be paying the slightest attention. (The Mating Season)

By The Way Nos 10 (June 2000) and 13 (June 2001), listed respectively the 'Ancient' connections of P G Wodehouse and the close relations on his father's side. In this final survey of his genealogical background, we consider the relations on his mother's side, again using information gathered by our Chairman, Norman Murphy, and augmented by information from *P G Wodehouse: Man and Myth* by Barry Phelps and *P G Wodehouse* by Frances Donaldson.

Rev John Bathurst Deane (1797-1887)

The Deane family is claimed to descend from Roberto de Dena, one of the Norman nobles at the Court of Edward the Confessor. The Rev John, one of many clergymen who feature among PGW's ancestors, was his maternal grandfather, and the author of a book about the life of an ancestor who had been one of Cromwell's generals, *A Life of Richard Deane, Major General and General at Sea in the Service of the Commonwealth*. He was born at the Cape of Good Hope and took Holy Orders in 1823. For nineteen years he was head maths and second classical master at Merchant Taylors School, London, where he had been educated, and at the age of 58 was given the parish of St Martin Outwich as a form of pension. He married twice.

Aunt Carol Deane, nee Lempriere

Rev John's first wife, who bore him two daughters.

Aunt Sophia (c 1830; still alive 1887)

Unmarried elder daughter of Carol Deane.

Aunt Augusta (d 1914)

Younger daughter of Carol Deane, married Edward Kynaston Bridger.

Louise Deane, nee Fourdrinier

Louise, PGW's grandmother, who provided the Rev John with the twelve children listed below, was a sister of Cardinal Newman's mother. After being widowed, she and her four unmarried daughters (Louisa, Mary, Anne and Emmeline) moved to Cheney Court, Box, in Wiltshire (*cf* Deverill Hall), where Wodehouse spent many of his school vacations.

Aunt Louisa (1835-1906)

In *Portrait of a Master*, Jasen wrote that Wodehouse told him he had her in mind when creating Aunt Dahlia, but that the character of Dahlia was based also on Lady Ilchester (keen on hunting and with a deep voice and sharp sense of humour, but no relation), whom he met in 1923.

Uncle Hugh Pollexfen (1837-1904)

A Major in the East Surrey Regiment, he married Juliette Danielle.

Uncle Walter Meredith, CMG (1840-1906)

Married Marion Taverner. He started life in Hong Kong Civil Service as an interpreter and rose, via a spell as second-in-command of the Hong Kong police force (as would his nephew, PG's brother Philip Peveril) to become Colonial Secretary in 1881. He lived near Emsworth in Hampshire in 1904-05 and took his nephew to dinner at local stately homes.

Aunt Evelyn Rosamund (1842-1910)

Married Malcolm Thompson, and died at Worplesdon in Surrey. It seems no mere coincidence that Lord Worplesdon's first fictional appearance, in the *Strand* magazine short story *Disentangling Old Percy*, came as soon as August 1912.



Aunt Mary (c1845-c1940)

Aunt Mary was an authoress with a dozen books of prose and poetry to her name, and is credited with completing the family history, *The Book of Dene, Deane and Adeane*. This book may be a major inspiration for the dozen or so Wodehouse characters who wrote their family memoirs. One was dedicated to a cousin, the Rt Hon Robert Wodehouse, MP for Bath 1880-1906, who lived at Woolmers, Hants. If as believed Mary was indeed the archetypal bossy, interfering aunt best illustrated by Bertie's Aunt Agatha, this dedication may have provided the name of Agatha's country estate, Woollam Chersey.

Could she also have inspired Madeline Bassett's soupy beliefs? Phelps quotes her verse:

Tread softly where the flowers grow
So primitive and wild
For if you crush a single bud
You kill a fairy child.

Norman Murphy believes that Mary Deane also represented the inspiration for Miss Julia Ukridge, an authoritarian writer, proud of her own literary achievements and scathing in her opinion of others. He points out that after her death in 1940, his subsequent troupe of litterateurs, such as Bill Shannon (*The Old Reliable*), Barbara Crowe (*Cocktail Time*) and Leila Yorke (*Ice in the Bedroom*), each had very different personalities.

Uncle John (1848-1908)

A Commander in the RN.

Aunt Caroline (1848-1932)

Married Clement Waldron.

Aunt Edith Harriet (c1852-1910)

Married Commander Augustus Bradshaw, RN.

Aunt Jane (d 1907 or 1917)

Married William Edgar Matthews.

Eleanor (c1853-1941)

Plum's mother (left), who married Henry Ernest Wodehouse on February 3rd, 1877. Eleanor had gone to Hong Kong to visit her brother Walter Meredith (see above) and met Ernest there. She was strong-willed, but Wodehouse was reluctant to parody his immediate family in his fiction, and Norman Murphy believes that the only character based on her was Nurse Wilks, the title character of *Portrait of a Disciplinarian in Meet Mr Mulliner*, who believed that boiled eggs were a food and that feet were meant to be wiped. Nurse Wilks lived in Bingley-on-Sea, which Norman equates to Bexhill-on-Sea, where his parents lived after leaving Cheltenham.

Aunt Anne (1854-1934)

An artist and sculptor, though overshadowed in her achievements by Emmeline.

Aunt Emmeline ('Nym') (1857-c1944)

An accomplished artist who exhibited seven times at the Royal Academy. One of her acclaimed portraits was of Cardinal Henry Newman, a relation (see Louise Deane, above) which shows a distinct likeness to Eleanor and is in the National Portrait Gallery.